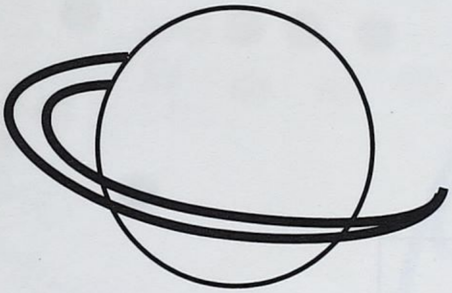
F
23
S63
P69
999

1155152595

An Alien among Us

A Diversity Game



Richard B. Powers

Moore Multicultural Center
School of Theology
Claremont, CA

INTERCULTURAL PRESS, INC.

For information contact:
Intercultural Press, Inc.
PO Box 700
Yarmouth, Maine 04096 USA
207–846–5168
© 1999 by Richard B. Powers

The Game Materials presented in this volume may be used or adapted for use in educational and training settings. Any other publication or distribution of the materials beyond quotations and excerpts of 200 words or less is prohibited without the written permission of Intercultural Press, Inc.

Design and production by Patty J. Topel

Printed in the United States of America

04 03 02 01 00 99 1 2 3 4 5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Powers, Richard B.
An alien among us: a diversity game/ Richard B. Powers.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 1-877864-74-9
1. Stereotype (Psychology) 2. Games—Psychological aspects. I. Title.
BF323.S63P69 1999
303.3'85—dc21 99–39391
CIP

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ~~~~~~ 4

Overview ~~~~~~ 5

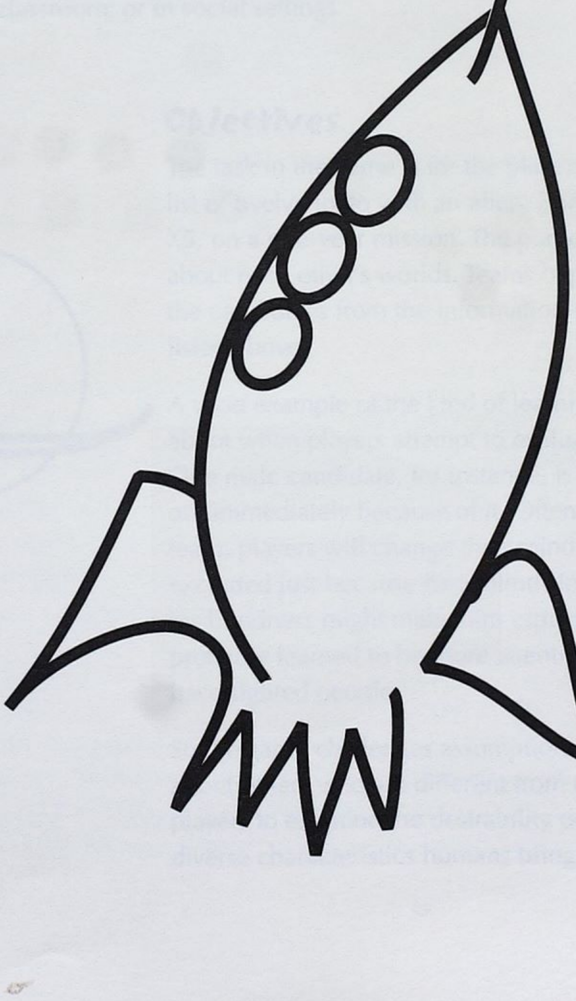
Procedure ~~~~~~ 7

Debriefing ~~~~~~ 15

Some Expected Outcomes ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ 18

References and Resources for Debriefing Simulations ~~~~~~~~~ 23

Game Materials ~~~~~~ 25



Acknowlegments

An Alien among Us would not have been published without the steadfast encouragement of Barbara Steinwachs. Thank you, Barbara. Thanks also to Michael Berney, who was an early adopter of the game. He provided valuable feedback that helped me rethink and redesign the scoring system.

It was a pleasure to work with editors David S. Hoopes and Judy Carl-Hendrick of Intercultural Press. David provided extensive commentary that improved the material in the debriefing section. Judy was fun to work with and reminded me of the importance of keeping things simple.

Finally, I thank my wife, Elki, who supports, even encourages, my time spent playing and designing games.

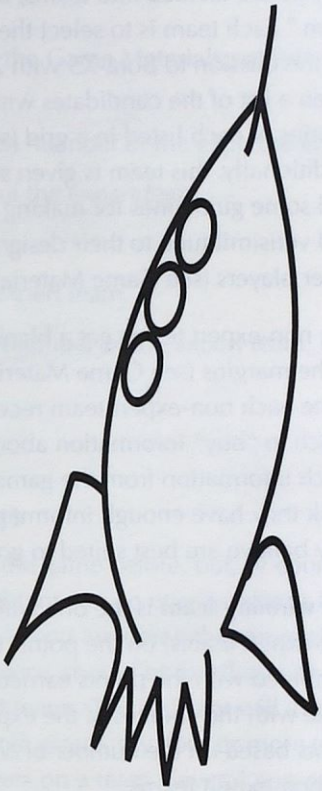
—Richard B. Powers
Oceanside, Oregon
July 1999

Overview

Purpose

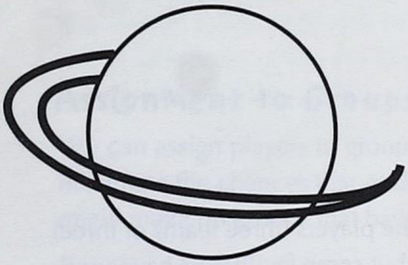
An Alien among Us is designed to broaden the players' perspective on human diversity and to help them appreciate and value diverse others. In the game, players are challenged to select the best candidates for an interplanetary mission on the basis of certain attributes and characteristics. The attributes fall into nine categories: sex, age, profession, health, citizenship, reason for going, positive attributes, negative attributes, and religion.

In the process of making their selections, players discover that their judgments are biased and influenced by stereotypes, and they realize that they have overlooked the benefits of the differences they devalued. This learning should give them a new perspective on what people are capable of doing when they are not hindered by their own or others' rigid mindsets. Ultimately, the intent of this game is to enable players to see the world around them in a new light and to understand that differences and diversity are not synonymous with problems and difficulties; instead, they can be our strength, enriching human experience and enabling us to achieve our collective aims, whether in the workplace, in the classroom, or in social settings.



Objectives

The task in the game is for the players to select six candidates from a list of twelve to go with an alien, Zor-zeva, back to her planet, Bora-X5, on a one-year mission. The purpose of the mission is to learn about each other's worlds. Teams of players must judge the fitness of the candidates from the information available in the nine categories listed above.



A vivid example of the kind of learning that occurs in the game comes about when players attempt to evaluate a candidate with a "disability." One male candidate, for instance, is blind, and many players rule him out immediately because of it. Often, however, after discussion in their team, players will change their minds. Why should a candidate be excluded just because he is blind? In fact, some players may argue that his blindness might make him especially qualified, since he has probably learned to be more attentive when listening to others than have sighted people.

So the game challenges assumptions and expectations people hold about others who are different from them. And the game encourages players to examine the desirability or undesirability of the incredibly diverse characteristics humans bring to any job or mission.

Description of the Game

Players are divided into teams, one of which is designated an "expert team." Each team is to select the candidates it thinks are best qualified for the mission to Bora-X5 with Zor-zeva. The expert team, only, is given a list of the candidates with the characteristics of all nine categories of each listed in a grid (see Game Materials, pages 40–41). Additionally, this team is given some information about world cultures and some guidelines for making a decision. This special help should add verisimilitude to their designation as "experts" in the eyes of the other players (see Game Materials, pages 28–34).

The non-expert teams get a blank grid with only the categories listed in the margins (see Game Materials, pages 38–39). At the outset of the game each non-expert team receives an allotment of 110 points with which to "buy" information about the candidates. Teams may buy as much information from the game director as they wish. When they think they have enough information, they select the six candidates they believe are best suited to go on the trip.

The winning team is the one with the highest score, based (for the non-expert teams) on the points they have left at the end of the game combined with the points earned for the number of "matches" they make with the choices of the expert team. The expert team gains points based on the number of "misses" or nonmatches made by all of the non-expert teams.

After the game is over, the final selection of the candidates is made through a process called "Zor-zeva's Weighting System" (see pages 10–13).

Requirements

The game can accommodate from nine players (three teams of three) to forty players (five groups of eight), but some facilitators have used the game with more than five groups, in which case I recommend that you add another assistant. The game is suitable for players from about the ninth grade to adult and takes about ninety minutes to play and debrief, depending upon the number of players.

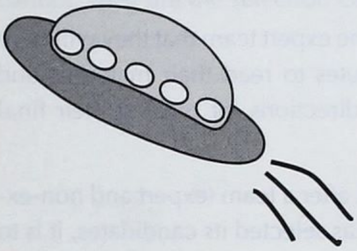
Master copies of the handouts for the players as well as the forms necessary for the game director are in the Game Materials section which starts on page 25. The only equipment needed is a room in which chairs can be placed in circles for small-group discussions and a blackboard or flipchart.

Procedure

Preparation of Materials

Make the designated number of copies of the following handouts from the Game Materials section:

- *Scenario* (pages 26–27). One copy for each player.
- *Information for the Expert Team* (pages 28–34). One copy for each member of the expert team.
- *Individual Ranking Form* (page 35). One copy for each member of the expert team.
- *Group Ranking Form* (page 36). One copy for the expert team.
- *Blank Information Form* (pages 38–39). One copy for each non-expert team.
- *Completed Information Form* (pages 40–41). One copy for each member of the expert team, one for the game director, and one for the assistant.



Selection of an Assistant

The assistant need not have played the game before, but, of course, it is helpful if she or he has. The assistant can go over questions from players in the non-expert teams while you are doing the same with the expert team. The assistant, therefore, should be familiar with the rules and scoring for the non-expert teams. The assistant will also prove to be helpful if you have a large group, say, four or more non-expert teams with five or more players on a team. Several non-expert teams may want to buy information at the same time. While you are busy selling to one team, the assistant can help another.

Assignment to Groups

You can assign players to groups randomly or with a specific goal in mind. If you want to maximize the chances that each team will have a stimulating discussion, for instance, you might make up groups that have the same mix of sex, age, and ethnicity.

You may want to consider having fewer players in the expert group. Assigning an odd number on the expert team helps speed up the selection process because it avoids ties in the voting for candidates. I have used three people on this team, when other teams had as many as eight people, and the game dynamics were not altered by the small size of the expert group.

If you are a teacher in a classroom setting and know which of your students are good readers, you might want to select from this group of students for the expert team, since players on the expert team have more material to read than the other players.

After teams have been formed and are in their groups, assign the non-expert teams a number, letter, or name for quick identification.

Other Information for the Players

- Write on a blackboard or flipchart so that they are visible throughout the game:
  a. The two goals of the game

     primary goal: to select the best six candidates for the trip

     secondary goal: to spend your allotment of points as efficiently as possible

  b. The key points of scoring from the "What to Tell Players about the Scoring and Selection of the Final Six" section (pages 9–10)

  c. The *Scoring and Final Selection Form* (page 37) in the Game Materials section

- Explain to the non-expert teams that the expert team has a form filled in with all of the information about the candidates and that the rest of the teams have only a blank form with categories of information listed on the top of the form. Call players' attention to the form and the categories.

- Explain to the non-expert teams that they may buy information about individual candidates from the game director or assistant at a cost of one point per item of information.

- Tell the non-expert teams that they will have 20–25 minutes in which to buy information, so they do not need to buy all of their information at one time. They will be warned five minutes before the end of this time.

- Tell the teams that they must work independently of each other and reach an agreement as to the best six persons to send.

- Emphasize to both the expert and non-expert teams that their primary goal is *to select the best* six candidates for the trip.* Explain to the non-expert teams that their secondary goal is *to spend their allotment of points as efficiently as possible.*

- Tell the non-expert teams that they will have 10–15 minutes to make their final selections after the end of the information purchasing.

- Explain to the expert team that they will have 30–40 minutes to read their materials and follow the directions for making their final selections.

- Explain that after a team (expert and non-expert alike) has selected its candidates, it is to write a sentence justifying each selection. These rationales will be helpful during the debriefing.

- After all teams have chosen their candidates, they should write their selections and their team names (or numbers) on the blackboard or flipchart. The expert team posts its selections only after all the non-expert teams have done so.

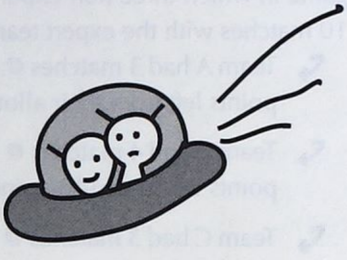
- Hand out the *Scenario, Information for the Expert Team*, the *Individual* and *Group Ranking Forms*, and the *Blank* and *Completed Information Forms*. Give the entire group 5 minutes to read the *Scenario*.

---

* A player may ask what the word *best* means at this point. In order not to exclude the decision by a group to choose their candidates by a random process, I believe that all you can answer to this question is to say that it is up to the group to decide what *best* means. You can emphasize that all voices in the group should be heard and that each group should agree on a process (e.g., voting or consensus) and follow that process in reaching their decisions.

Hints

A question typically asked by players on the non-expert teams is, What is the information the expert team has that we don't have? Remind them that the expert team has the *Completed Information Form* and tell them that the expert team also has some additional guidelines for making decisions. Tell them that they will be given a *Completed Information Form* to look at following the debriefing.[†]



Players also ask if they can trade information with the other non-expert teams or talk to them during the decision period, even though they have been told to work independently. They cannot. Stress to these players that it is the decision of each team, independently arrived at, that is of interest to Zor-zeva.

Finally, players almost always ask if they can send themselves. They cannot. They are the selection committee, not the candidates.

What to Tell Players about Scoring and the Selection of the Final Six

Scoring for the non-expert teams. Non-expert teams start with an allotment of 110 points for each team. There are 108 items of information about the twelve candidates, and teams may use as many of their points to buy information as they choose. The final score for each non-expert team is obtained from two sources:

- The number of matches with the expert's list (a match earns 20 points).
- The number of points left in the team's allotment of 110 points.

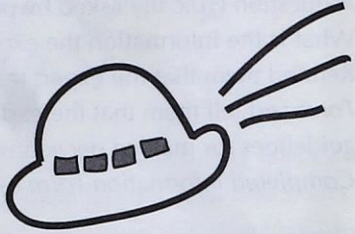
Scoring for the expert team. The expert team earns points for every nonmatch by a non-expert team. The number of points the expert team earns for a nonmatch depends upon how many non-expert teams are in the game. For example, if you have three non-expert teams, the expert team will earn 17 points for each nonmatch. Write on the board only the scoring rule that applies in the game you are playing.

- For two non-expert teams, 25 points for each nonmatch.
- For three non-expert teams, 17 points for each nonmatch.
- For four non-expert teams, 13 points for each nonmatch.
- For five non-expert teams, 10 points for each nonmatch.

The rationale for decreasing the number of points for a nonmatch when more teams play is that the number of potential nonmatches increases as the number of teams increases.

[†] You can allow the non-expert players to review all the materials given to the expert team after the debriefing. As a teacher, this would be an excellent strategy for preparing all students for a comprehensive discussion at the next class meeting. If, however, you intend to use the game with several classes in a short period of time, you might want to defer handing out the package given to the expert team until after all groups have played the game.

The example below shows scores that would have been earned in a game in which three non-expert teams (A, B, and C) had a total of 10 matches with the expert team's selections:



- Team A had 3 matches @ 20 points per match = 60 points + 70 points left from their allotment of 110 points = a score of *130.*
- Team B had 4 matches @ 20 points per match = 80 points + 75 points left from 110 points = a score of *155.*
- Team C had 3 matches @ 20 points per match = 60 points + 50 points left from 110 points = a score of *110.*
- The expert team earned 17 points for each miss by a non-expert team, so they had 8 misses[‡] x 17 points for a final score of *136.*

In this example, then, Team B was the winner. It may appear that the scoring system gives the advantage to the expert team. However, in my experience with this scoring system, one of the non-expert teams has usually won.

Zor-zeva's Weighting System

The final step, after the winner of the game has been determined, is for Zor-zeva to use her weighting system to select the six to travel with her. Any candidate selected by the expert team earns 3 points. Any selected by a non-expert team earns 2 points. For example, if Candidate A was selected by the expert team (3 points) and received a vote from two of the non-expert teams (2 + 2 points), Candidate A's score would be 7 points. Candidates with the highest scores are selected for the trip.

[‡] Remember, since each team picks a total of six candidates, the number of misses equals 6 minus the number of matches. In the example above, Team A had 3 matches and therefore 3 misses; Team B had 4 matches, 2 misses; and Team C had 3 matches, 3 misses (3 + 2 + 3 = 8 misses).

Example 1

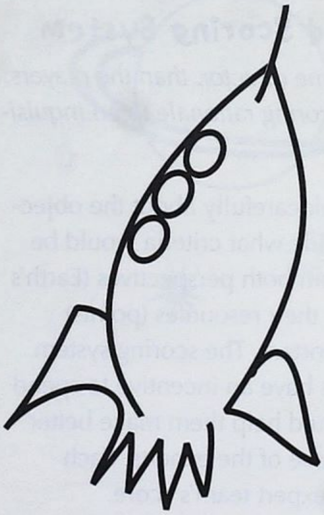
Hypothetical outcome for a game with four non-expert teams and one expert team. Candidates selected for the trip are A, C, F, G, I, and K.

Scoring and Final Selection Form

Non-expert Teams

Person	1	2	3	4	5	Expert	Final Score
A	2	2	2				⑥
B				2		3	5
C	2	2	2	2		3	⑪
D	2	2					4
E				2		3	5
F	2		2			3	⑦
G	2	2	2				⑥
H	2						2
I		2	2			3	⑦
J				2			2
K		2	2	2		3	⑨
L				2			2

Alternate Weighting System for Teams Who Spent All Their Points



Sometimes a team will spend all of its points to fill in every blank on its form (108). When this occurs, this team may argue that since they have a filled-in form just like the expert team, Zor-zeva should give them the same weight as the expert team. They feel it is unfair that teams who were "misers" and hoarded all their points and happened to guess lucky should have more influence over the choice of candidates than they do. When this happens, you can use a different Zor-zeva weighting scale, we'll call it a 4–3–2 scale. Candidates selected by the expert team earn 4 points. Candidates selected by the non-expert teams that spent all their points are assigned 3 points. Candidates chosen by all other non-expert teams get 2 points.

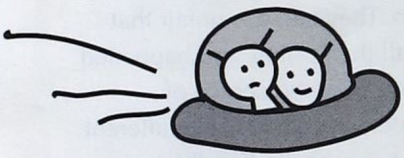
Example 2

Hypothetical outcome for the same game as in Example 1 but this time giving more weight to Team 4. Team 4 used all of its points to buy all the information on the candidates. Candidates selected by Teams 1, 2, and 3 were given 2 points, candidates selected by Team 4 were given 3 points, and candidates selected by the expert team were given 4 points. Candidates selected for the trip are B, C, E, F, I, and K.

Scoring and Final Selection Form

Non-expert Teams

Person	1	2	3	4	5	Expert	Final Score
A	2	2	2				6
B				3		4	⑦
C	2	2	2	3		4	⑬
D	2	2					4
E				3		4	⑦
F	2		2			4	⑧
G	2	2	2				6
H	2						2
I		2	2			4	⑧
J				3			3
K		2	2	3		4	⑪
L				3			3



Rationale for the Point and Scoring System

This information is more for you, the game director, than the players. However, it may help you explain the scoring rationale to an inquisitive player.

The scoring system forces players to think carefully about the objectives of the mission. Players need to decide what criteria would be most relevant to a successful mission from both perspectives (Earth's and Bora-X5's) and how best to allocate their resources (points) among the categories they select as important. The scoring system was developed so that non-expert teams have an incentive to spend points for information, because that should help them make better decisions, that is, more matches with those of the experts. Each match raises their score and lowers the expert team's score.

The weighting system of the alien was added because, in one game, the expert team maintained they were the only ones who counted. They argued that the other teams were simply trying to guess what they had chosen and, therefore, could be ignored. Players on the non-expert teams saw this position as arrogant and were deeply resentful. Zor-zeva's Weighting System accomplishes two objectives:

- It injects a bit of humility among the players on the expert team; in other words, the candidates they select do not automatically go on the trip.
- It helps eliminate ties.

Because of my experiences with *An Alien among Us*, I have continued to modify the scoring. In one sense the scoring is not that important. Once players get into the debriefing, their eyes open with respect to other points of view and they discover significant things about themselves. Then, who won or lost becomes unimportant (for most). But until that time the scoring system is vital. Players only know they are competing with other teams. The lessons of the game are still to come. If the scoring is seen as biased, *unfair in any way*, players will distance themselves from the game, from you, and from any potential learning. So if you find, for example, that the expert team wins too often, revise the point system as I have done here with the Zor-zeva Weighting System.

Play of the Game

Go over the sequence of events in the game. List these steps on the board or flipchart:

- The expert team reads their handouts and follows the procedures described to reach a decision about the six candidates to travel with Zor-zeva.
- The non-expert teams discuss the categories of information and decide what information to buy.
- The non-expert teams have a 20-minute (or whatever your time limit is) period in which to buy information. They will be warned 5 minutes before this buying period is over.
- All teams will have 10–15 minutes to make their selections and write their justifications.
- After each non-expert team has made its selections, one player from that team will enter the team's selections on the board or flipchart. After all non-expert teams have listed their final six on the board or flipchart, the expert team will list its final six.
- Scores will be computed, a winner determined, and the final six will be selected for the trip.

All teams should appoint one team member to be the recorder. Tell the teams that the game director and/or assistant will be selling information and they should signal when they want to "buy" one or more items of information. You or the assistant will go to that team, sit next to the designated recorder, and whisper the item(s) of information requested. This player records the information and the number of points spent on the team's *Blank Information Form.* The game director or assistant then moves on to another group. Remind players that they can continue to buy information as long as the time limit has not elapsed, so information items *do not* all have to be purchased at the same time. At the end of the purchasing time, announce that no more information may be purchased.

Debriefing

Immediately following the determination of the winners and the six candidates to go with Zor-zeva, players usually want to argue about the merits of their particular selection. If a group opted for a random procedure to choose the final six, be prepared for especially passionate arguments from players on the other non-expert teams about the "wrongheadedness" of this procedure. Such a discussion can lead to a stimulating exchange about the nature of fairness, but it can become lengthy and will preclude a discussion of other learning points in the game. If your debriefing starts to bog down in arguments surrounding fairness, tell players that you will come back to the fairness issue after other topics such as diversity, insights about others, and insights about the self have been discussed.

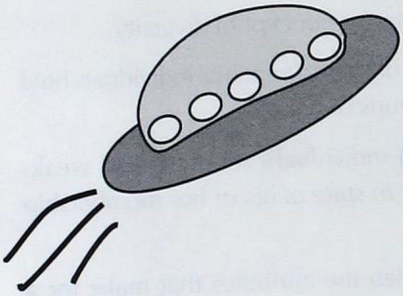
After some of the heat of the initial discussion has diminished, it is helpful to remind players of the purposes of the exercise. You might write any or all of the following on the blackboard or flipchart:

Learning Objectives

- discover the variety of ways in which people differ
- rethink and perhaps redefine the concept of diversity
- discover and examine some of the assumptions individuals hold with respect to different groups of people
- examine and reevaluate an individual's strengths and weaknesses both *because of* and *in spite of* his or her membership in a particular group
- redefine and perhaps broaden the attributes that make for a contribution to a team or workforce

Diversity Issues Raised by the Game

- What might some of the advantages and disadvantages be of sending a culturally diverse group on this visit?
- What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of sending a culturally homogeneous group?
- Has your concept of diversity changed as a result of your experience in the game? If so, how?
- Did the composition of the group and its members' potential interaction with one another enter into your deliberations? (That is, some individuals might not get along with each other for an extended time and might ruin the visit for everybody.)
- Are there ethnic groups and/or cultures not represented among our twelve that you feel should have been? Which culture or people? Why?
- Ask for individual experiences in encountering another culture. What expectations or assumptions were altered when individuals "bumped into" another way of doing, thinking, or being? What did they discover about themselves? (This is an especially valuable question if you have foreign participants in your game.)

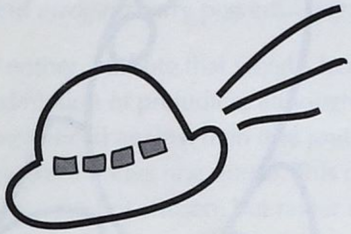


Insights about Others and the Self

- What was one assumption you or a member of your team made that interfered with your selection process? Explain.
- Were you surprised by your teammates' selections? By their reasoning? By the other teams' selections or their reasoning? Explain.
- What are some insights you gained about the others on *your* team? About the players on the *other* teams?
- Sometimes an attribute of a person that is initially seen as a limitation or handicap turns out, after reflection, not to be so. Did you experience such a change in perspective during the game? If so, briefly describe your experience.
- What are some things you learned about yourself in this game?
- How might you apply what you learned in this game to your school, college, or workplace? To your daily life?

Effectiveness of Teams with Partial Information (non-expert) Compared to the Team with Complete Information (expert)

- Did the expert team use different criteria than the non-expert teams? If they did, what reasons did they give for their choices?
- Did the expert team make a better decision than the other teams?
- Was the expert team's task easier or more difficult than teams with incomplete information? Why?



The Process of Making a Decision[§]

- What categories of information did your team choose as important for the candidates?
- What criteria did your team use in selecting the information to buy? That is, if your team did not buy all twelve items of information under a category, why not?
- Once your team had purchased its information, what criteria governed your selection of individuals for the visit?
- Why do you think that the criteria you used were more important than the criteria used by the other teams (or other criteria that might have been used)? That is, did you have one major criterion that provided an overall justification for your selections?
- In your deliberations, did you consider the advantages and disadvantages both to us and to the alien culture of a candidate? (Some groups never consider the benefits of a candidate to the alien's culture, only the benefits to Earth.)

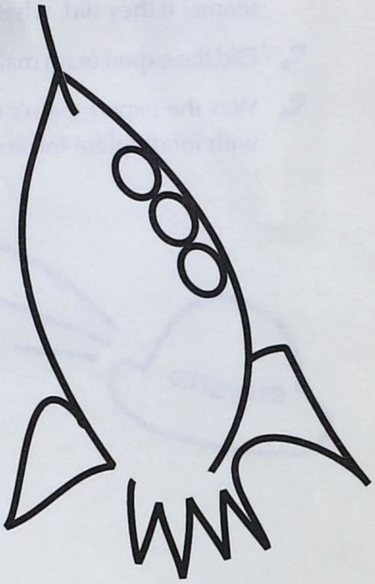
[§] Although *Alien* is not a game about decision making per se, an integral part of the game does involve making a good decision from the information given. Teams have used some strange criteria in choosing the information to buy, for example, selecting one item of information about each individual on a diagonal of the chart, that is, the sex of A, the age of B, the profession of C, and so forth. This method left them with no way of comparing individuals with respect to a given item of information and was a poor use of their points.

A more common problem is the prominence given to the categories "Reason for going," "Positive attributes," and "Negative attributes." The information in these categories tells us about a given individual but very little about the group or culture she or he comes from and so is of limited value to the alien. (See the topic on "Considerations from Zor-zeva's Perspective" in the handout, *Information for the Expert Team*, page 28.)

Some Expected Outcomes

Reexamination of Beliefs

One of the most important outcomes for me has been the number of players who have reexamined their thinking and discovered that many supposed "limitations" of a candidate turned out not to be so.



Health. Players often confess in the debriefing that initially, they argued against a candidate because she or he had a disability. But in discussing the supposed limitations associated with each of these conditions, players came to see them as neither relevant nor insurmountable. Candidates' potential contributions eventually took on greater importance than their disability.

In fact, none of the candidates with a disability listed under "Health" has consistently been excluded in any game I have run. Every candidate (including the candidate with AIDS) has had at least one proponent in the games played to date. So the poor health of the candidate or his or her so-called disability is not seen as a liability that cannot be overcome.

One reason for sending the candidate with AIDS could be that the alien culture might have a cure for AIDS. Another reason for sending her could be that even if she died on their planet, the aliens would gain knowledge about our culture through this event. Their anthropologists could learn about our attitudes toward death and our rituals surrounding it by observing how the team coped with the death of one of their own.

This is not to suggest that a candidate's disease should be ignored. People on Bora-X5 might not be resistant to the germs we carry, and if those in charge of the mission were not extremely careful, Earthlings could cause widespread disease and death by infecting the aliens they contacted.

Age. A good number of players assume either that candidates' ages are in the middle of the distribution of average adult ages (30–60) or that candidates are close to their own age. With such an assumption, a group may believe that they need not buy information about the ages of the candidates. The players in such a team are chagrined to learn at the end of the game that one of the candidates is only ten years of age, while another is eighty-five. Some players might then protest that the first was too young and the second too old to be of much value on an interplanetary mission. But others may challenge this team's reasoning and point to the advantages of youth (fresh view, ask questions older people don't ask anymore) and the advantages of age (sense of history, knowledge of life's joys and sorrows, wisdom).

Characteristics that Bias Players

Some candidates' characteristics weigh heavily against inclusion on the team selected. One of the candidates, for example, is a computer salesman, and his reason for going is the "opportunity for expansion" (with the implication of a new market for his company). Once players discover his reason for going on the trip, he is never selected.

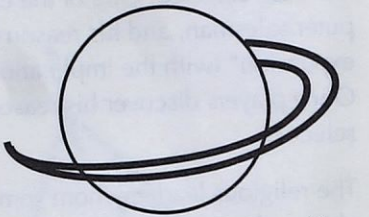
The religious leader, whom some have labeled "sexist," is also almost always excluded, and the judge who is labeled "arrogant" is excluded almost as often as the religious leader. The words *sexist* and *arrogant* carry powerful negative bias in our culture.

Another attribute that weighs heavily against a candidate is an admission of prejudice, although it does not seem as bad to be prejudiced against men (the journalist) as it is to be prejudiced against Hindus (the nurse). This doesn't mean that these two candidates are not chosen, but rather that those arguing for them must make a strong case for them.

Putting Our Best Foot Forward

In the initial discussions, participants in most groups argue for selecting those who won't reflect poorly on Earthlings. We want others to see only our best side, much like people preparing for a first date want to show off only what they consider their best features. However, as discussion evolves, a majority of players begin to view this practice as deceptive. Questions often arise: Why should we hide our prejudices and the people who have them? Isn't it the case that the alien culture needs to see all of our sides? What does it matter anyway? Why should one's prejudices override what one can learn and bring back?

Benefits of Foreign Participants



If your players include foreign participants or students, be prepared for some surprises. Religion has never been selected as a criterion by a group composed wholly of American players, but it was selected as the first criterion by a team that included foreign students (Powers 1993). Similarly, a sociologist who played the game argued that the religion category would make an excellent one from the aliens' perspective. So much would be revealed by studying Earth's religions that they, like the foreign students, would make it the first category to be examined.

Foreign participants have helped expose one of my own Western biases. In an earlier version of the game, the medical candidate was a doctor from Russia, and I assigned the attribute "very nationalistic" to him. In my eyes, *nationalistic* is a pejorative term, but three foreign players (from Russia, India, and Sri Lanka) considered nationalism to be positive and very desirable. I suggest that, if at all possible, you include players from other countries in your game. It is sure to produce surprises for players of the host culture and a much richer experience for all.

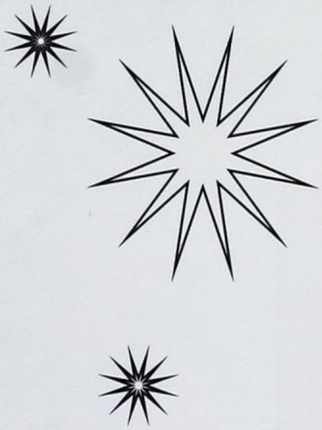
Random Selection as Fair

Consistently, at least one of the non-expert teams will choose *not* to buy any information at all in an attempt to maximize their score and because it appeals to their sense of fairness. They select their candidates by such quasi-random processes as a flip of the coin, choosing every odd-numbered candidate, using the initials of their last names, and so on. This "random selection" group finds itself the focus of severe questioning and challenges during the debriefing. Its argument rests upon some variation of this theme: obtaining information about the candidates simply allows one's prejudices to come into play and therefore leads to a less "fair" decision than that based upon random selection. This is a good opportunity for the game director to introduce the concept of fairness. What does it mean to be fair in our culture? Is our concept of fairness universal; in other words, is it shared by other cultures? Why does a random selection automatically make a decision fair anyway?

In one game with YWCA campers, a bright girl (after listening to another player's comments justifying the random selection procedure) made a point I had not considered. While a random procedure may seem fair for the twelve candidates involved, it is not fair from the perspective of being an accurate representation of world demographics. That is, the fact that a candidate may be Chinese or Muslim should make it more likely that he or she will be selected over candidates from less populated regions or less well-known religions, *if,* as would be desirable from the aliens' perspective, the traveling team is to be as representative as possible. So if participants do not challenge the fairness of the random selection procedure in the debriefing, the game director can do so and at the same time emphasize the importance of considering fairness from more than one point of view.

Maximizing Points as the Only Strategy

One problem I encountered with earlier versions of the game was that players on the non-expert teams resisted spending their points because one of the objectives was to "spend as few points as possible" in reaching their decision. I have eliminated this phrase and now stress that the primary objective is *to make the best decision with the information they have.* This emphasis helps, but the desire to win by having the most points, even for professional educators, is strong and players may not hear the stress you place on this objective. The secondary objective, *to use one's resources in an efficient way,* still tends to dominate players' actions. Therefore, I remind players of these priorities as I sit with them and sell information to them.



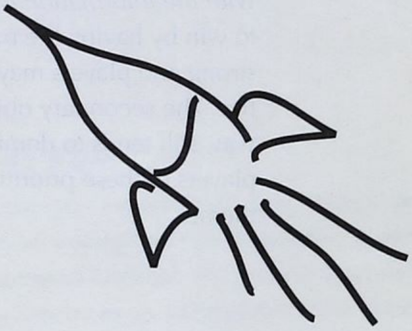
Use of Real-Life Content in the Game

This game is an example of a *frame game,* that is, a game with a simple structure or skeleton that can accommodate a variety of content. For instance, administrators could be asked to select six of twelve police officers for work in multiethnic teams in a minority neighborhood, or personnel managers can be assigned to select six of twelve junior executives for the company's overseas training program.

One of the advantages of frame games, then, is that it is relatively easy to substitute data relating to real-life jobs or tasks. The process and outcomes in games with real-life content can then be compared with the processes and outcomes in fantasy games like *Alien.* A discrepancy in the choices players make between games with fantasy objectives (trip to Bora-X5) and games with real-life objectives (the awarding of scholarships, for example) may force players to confront the unexamined baggage they bring to making a decision in a real-life context.

Changing the Game

I learn that a game of mine has been successfully "adopted" when I receive feedback telling me that, after using the game a few times, the facilitator has made some changes. Now, they report, the game works even better. I do the same thing with the games I use regularly. I make them fit my time constraints, my students' level, or my goals. I also modify them to correct what I perceive as shortcomings. There is nothing wrong in this. In fact, it's healthy. When the facilitator sees ways to improve the game and is eager to experiment, it means she truly understands the game. The facilitator "owns" the game in the same sense that a good cook owns a recipe he loves and is therefore comfortable making changes. A good game is a living, evolving thing. It's never finished. So perhaps all games are frame games, skeletons or structures to be added to, developed, tweaked, and used in ways the original designer never imagined.



References and Resources for Debriefing Simulations

Baker, Ann C., Patricia J. Jensen, and David A. Kolb. "In Conversation: Transforming Experience into Learning." *Simulation & Gaming* 28, no. 1 (1997): 6–12. (A refreshingly different and creative approach to debriefing based on the establishment of a genuine conversation between facilitator and participants.)

Harris, Marvin. *The Sacred Cow and the Abominable Pig: Riddles of Food and Culture.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985.

Hsu, Francis L. K. *Americans and Chinese: Passages to Differences.* 3d. ed. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1981.

———. *Clan, Caste, and Club.* New York: Van Nostrand, 1963.

Huyler, Stephen P. *Painted Prayers: Women's Art in Village India.* New York: Rizzoli, 1994.

Petranek, Charles F., Susan Corey, and Rebecca Black. "Three Levels of Learning in Simulations: Participating, Debriefing, and Journal Writing." *Simulation & Gaming* 23, no. 2 (1992): 174–85. (A good discussion of the benefits of three different kinds of procedures.)

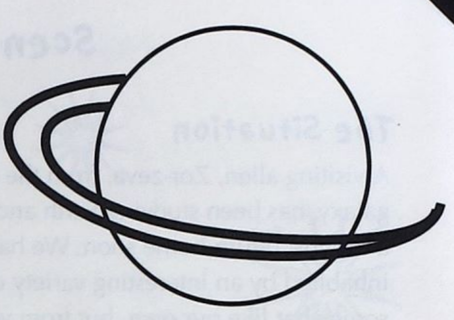
Powers, Richard B. "Visit to an Alien Planet: A Cultural Diversity Game." *Simulation & Gaming* 24, no. 4 (1993): 509–18. (This article described an early version of the current game.)

Shirts, Garry R. *Starpower.* Del Mar, CA: Simulation Training Systems, 1969.

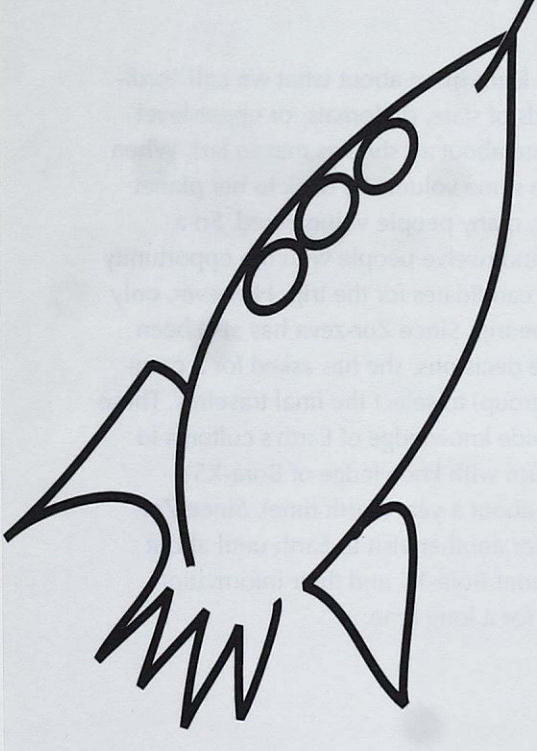
Steinwachs, Barbara. "How to Facilitate a Debriefing." *Simulation & Gaming* 23, no. 2 (1992): 186–95. (Easy-to-follow, step-by-step description of the basic debriefing procedure.)

Stevens, Phillips. "Religion." In *Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, edited by David Levinson and Melvin Ember. New York: Henry Holt, 1996.

Thiagarajan, Sivasailam, and Barbara Steinwachs. *Barnga: A Simulation Game on Cultural Clashes.* Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1990.



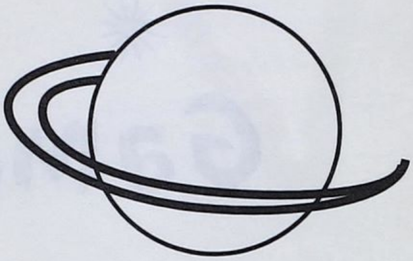
Game Materials



Scenario

The Situation

A visiting alien, Zor-zeva, from the planet Bora-X5 in a distant galaxy, has been studying Earth and its people for six months now and must return home soon. We have learned that her planet is inhabited by an interesting variety of animals, peoples, and cultures somewhat like our own, but from what we can discover, enough differences exist to generate intriguing puzzles. For example, she was surprised to discover how much talking we do but how much trouble we have understanding each other, especially in situations involving those important to us. On her planet, children undergo a procedure called "melding" (closest word she could find) at the beginning of their education. The process sensitizes the children to the moods, pleasures, and discomforts of "the other." She was upset by habitual acts of ours such as "judging the other" or "hiding our feelings" when the other was in need of a sympathetic listener. Such verbal tactics simply do not occur in her culture. As a consequence, she believes that much less talk but more effective communication occurs in her culture than in ours.



She has expressed a desire to learn more about what we call "ordinary people" rather than heads of state, diplomats, or upper-level government officials (which are about all she has met so far). When she expressed a desire to take some volunteers back to her planet with her for an extended visit, many people volunteered. So a worldwide lottery was held, and twelve people won the opportunity to be considered as potential candidates for the trip. However, only six may accompany her on the trip. Since Zor-zeva has also been studying how Earthlings make decisions, she has asked for a committee of Earth people (your group) to select the final travelers. These fortunate sojourners will provide knowledge of Earth's cultures to Zor-zeva's world and will return with knowledge of Bora-X5's culture(s). They will return in about a year (Earth time). Since Zor-zeva's people have no plans for another visit to Earth until about A.D. 4050, our information about Bora-X5 and their information about us will not be updated for a long time.

one copy for each player

Your Objectives

1. **Primary Objective**: *to select the best six candidates for the trip.* When making your choices, consider not only what we might learn about the people of Bora-X5 but also what they might learn about us. For each person your team selects, write a sentence or two justifying your choice.
2. **Secondary Objective**: *to spend your allotment of points as efficiently as possible.* For the non-expert teams, part of your score will be determined by how many points remain in your account after buying information about the candidates.

Information for the Expert Team

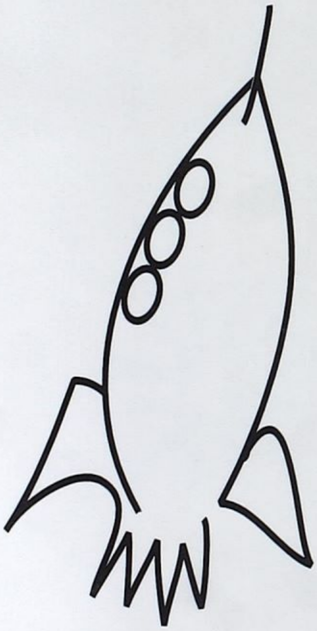
Although your task is the same as the other groups, that is, to select the best six people to go with Zor-zeva, you are going to serve as the expert team. To help you make informed decisions, you will find below some background information and some guidelines for making a rational decision. If you follow these guidelines, your final choices will be more informed than if you had used a less systematic procedure. While the non-expert teams are buying their information (20–25 minutes), please read the following information carefully but quickly prior to starting your selection discussion.

Major Criteria

You should consider two major criteria in selecting the characteristics to use in ranking the candidates. Your final choice should be the six persons who best satisfy *both* criteria:

a. The candidates should be those most able to inform the people(s) of Bora-X5 about Earth and its people(s).

b. The candidates should be those most able to inform us about Bora-X5 and its people(s).



Considerations from Zor-zeva's Perspective

Since the people of Bora-X5 are interested in learning as much as possible about us from only six people, we have to think about the attributes that would be most informative to them. The language, daily practices, attitudes, and values associated with living in a particular country or geographical area are part of what makes up an individual's culture. One's culture is, therefore, a large part of what defines a person.

It is sometimes difficult to think about culture as a significant difference among peoples because until we "bump into" a completely different culture, we don't realize how much of our attitudes, thinking, and behavior is culturally determined.

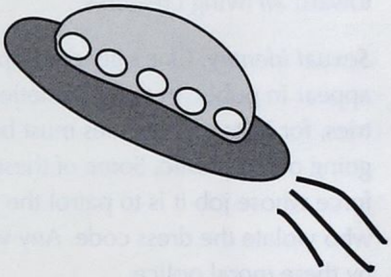
one copy for each member of the expert team

Old age. As an example of a significant cultural difference, consider Francis Hsu's (1981) description in his book *Americans and Chinese* of the attitudes and practices of the American and Chinese cultures with respect to aging and the perception of the aged.

> At the threshold of old age, the self-reliant American faces problems rarely known to his Chinese brethren. The first consequence of old age is the loss of economic independence, or at least the likelihood of a lowered standard of living. (335–36)

A second consequence for the American is his or her social isolation.

> His children, whether single or married, have drifted away from him. Even if they are physically near, he has little place in their lives. (336)



The situation could hardly be more different for the Chinese.

> The Chinese elder has no fear of unemployment. Long before he is physically unable to work, he is likely to have retired to live on the fruits of his children's labor. (336)

The social life of the Chinese elders changes with age, but unlike their American counterparts, they become *more* central in the lives of their children.

> Chinese men and women continually seek the counsel of and company of their elders. Even in recreational activities, of which social gambling is a very important form, the old regularly join the young. Furthermore, the elders enjoy a degree of authority over the young that is unheard of in the West. (336)

Religion. Another important layer of the cultural onion is one's religion. Phillips Stevens (1996) writes that the study of religion has shown anthropologists

> that certain religious ideas are universal and seem as old as human society; that things religious pervade other cultural systems and cannot adequately be studied separate from those contexts; that religion is an extremely powerful motivator of behavior; that religious structures and, especially, sentiments are reflective of social ones; that religion forms a strong basis for social and cultural identity and is a common yardstick by which people compare themselves with others. (1088)

Think of the variety of ways peoples of the world worship! Consider, as only one example, the ways animals are treated in different religions. Marvin Harris (1985) writes in *The Sacred Cow and the Abominable Pig* that

> Hindus venerate their cows (and bulls) as deities, keep them around the house, give them names, talk to them, deck them with flowers and tassels, let them have the right of way on busy thoroughfares, and try to place them in animal shelters when they become sick or old and no longer can be cared for at home. (48)

Hindus should never eat beef but may eat pork, while Muslims and Orthodox Jews may eat beef but never pork. And Jains, an Indian religion founded around the sixth century B.C., practice nonviolence toward *all* living creatures.

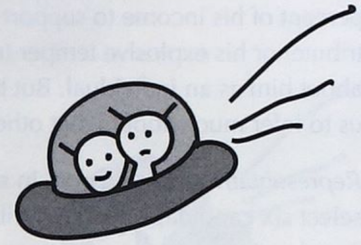
Sexual identity. One's gender imposes strict rules on how one can appear in public in many societies. In conservative Muslim countries, for instance, females must be covered from head to foot when going out in public. Some of these societies have a religious police force whose job it is to patrol the public venues and look for females who violate the dress code. Any violator is immediately dealt with by these moral police.

In some African and Arab countries more than two million girls a year undergo a circumcision ritual at puberty. A girl's clitoris and much of her labia minora are cut away. The rationale for this practice is that it is necessary to lessen girls' sexual desire and to prepare them for marriage. There is no such corresponding ritual for boys in any of Earth's countries. Zor-zeva is puzzled by this practice and wonders why such cultures believe female sexual desire is so destructive or harmful that it must be suppressed.

There are, then, vast differences between the way males and females in various cultures are treated. But there are some commonalities in being a male or a female that cut across cultures, too. For example, in most of the world's cultures, males are given more education than females, males earn more than females within a given occupation, and, in much of the world (Asia, for instance), male children are preferred over female children. The result is that in Asia there are more adult males than females in spite of a birth ratio that favors females. Which candidate(s) would be able to explain to Zor-zeva this preference for one sex over the other in much of our world?

one copy for each member of the expert team

Profession. Some societies have complex rules governing the interactions among members of different professions, such as those of Hindu India. Which candidate could explain to Zor-zeva the meaning of the term *untouchable*? Why is there such a category of human beings? Francis Hsu (1963) suggests in *Clan, Caste, and Club* that to understand the caste system of India and why it persists, we need to understand Hindu philosophy.



> Caste in India expresses the basic conflict inherent in the Hindu way of life. Caste is based on the theoretical position of oneness of all living beings. It regards the multiple self-enclosed caste walls merely as part of the total fabric, using individual improvement through reincarnation as the bridge across them. Casteism is, therefore, not a defect to be remedied even in some future time, however remote. It expresses a conflict which allows no permanent solution. (188)

Even within societies that value equality among their citizens, there are huge differences in the rewards members of different occupations receive. The glory and riches associated with being a professional sports star have reached incredible heights in the United States. Why does the sports hero accrue so much money, power, and significance, while leaders in other fields (music, art, medicine, law, and education) remain relatively unacknowledged? What values does the American culture encourage by this reward system?

Individual versus cultural attributes. Interests, skills, and temperament belong to individuals and contribute more information about them than the culture they belong to. What personal attributes will maximize the knowledge that we might provide the Bora-X5 culture? Think of a person as made up of "layers," with some layers providing much more information than others. As an example, let's start with a candidate named Jim Nelson, who was born and raised in the United States. You already know quite a bit about this person and can make good guesses about some of his characteristics. For instance, it's a good bet he speaks English, knows the general rules of baseball and American football, does not know the rules of English cricket, and so forth. When you find out that he is a surgeon specializing in open heart surgery, you can add a great deal of information (by way of educated guesses) to your knowledge of Jim Nelson: he must be intelligent, have had years of specialized education, have a much higher income than most Americans, and so on.

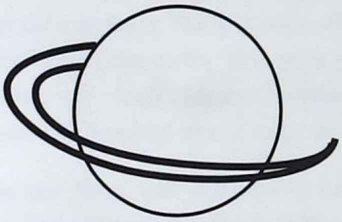
one copy for each member of the expert team

Jim Nelson's other attributes, such as his generosity (he donates 10 percent of his income to support a homeless shelter (positive attribute) or his explosive temper (negative attribute), tell us quite a bit about him as an individual. But these latter attributes do not allow us to infer much about what other Americans are like.

Representativeness criterion. In sum, as an alien, Zor-zeva wants to select six candidates whose attributes reveal the most about Earth's peoples. One strategy your team might adopt to meet Zor-zeva's objectives is to select candidates on the basis of as broad a representation of Earth's peoples as possible. Thus, a citizen of China (about 21 percent of the world's population) or a person of the Roman Catholic or Muslim religions (each about 20 percent of the world's population) would carry considerable weight.

It would also be desirable if a candidate had *more than one* highly representative attribute. So if a person spoke one of the major languages of the world (Chinese, English, Hindi), had specialized training (medical doctor, anthropologist), and practiced one of the world's major religions (Roman Catholic, Hindu), he or she would be preferred over a candidate who had only one or two of these three attributes.

Considerations from Earth's Perspective

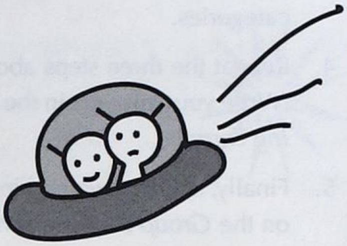


One big difference in the objectives between Zor-zeva and us is that we want to make sure that our visitors return. If any die before returning, the knowledge that person may bring back will be lost. This means that the health of the candidates is an important criterion from Earth's perspective.

A second criterion for us is for the six travelers to represent a wide variety of perspectives from which to report back to Earth. A variety of perspectives helps make for a balanced picture of the alien culture. A female, for instance, might see things that a male misses or ignores, and vice versa. A farmer would be adept at learning about what and how food is grown or produced, climate, and so forth. A civil engineer would probably spend a great deal of time examining the conveyances that transport inhabitants from place to place, housing, energy production, and the like.

one copy for each member of the expert team

As important, perhaps, as the "variety-of-perspectives" criterion is what we might call a "trained-to-see" criterion—the ability to observe and report accurately what one encounters. Some professionals, such as anthropologists, have been trained to observe different cultures and can provide valuable insights about the aliens' culture, insights that might be missed by one trained in another profession.



Consider, for instance, the work of ethnologist and art historian Stephen Huyler (1994), who has photographed the exquisitely beautiful designs that Indian women (both Hindu and Muslim) paint on the floors, entrances, and walls of their homes. This folk art is used to communicate with and honor the deities so important to the village women. A mother's designs are passed down to her daughter, who begins her apprenticeship to her mother from the time she can walk. These designs were not considered art by professionals, because they were ephemeral (the floor designs were erased within a few hours each day by people walking over them) and because it was "women's art" and therefore not of much importance. It took an outsider, one with special training, to validate the beauty of these designs as art and to tell the rest of the world how important they were in the daily lives of these women.

In sum, from Earth's perspective, three important criteria are (1) the health of the candidate, (2) his or her training in observing others, and (3) the variety or "mix" of the candidates.

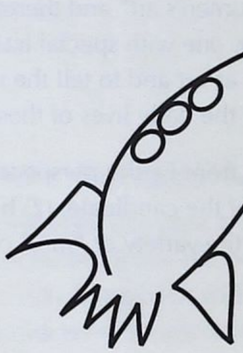
Coming to a Decision

How should you proceed so that both Bora-X5's and Earth's goals are satisfied? The following is one set of guidelines you might use.

1. Individually rank the categories in order of importance as if you were Zor-zeva. (Use the *Individual Ranking Form* [1st Rank] to record your choices.) Try to avoid giving two categories the same rank. If each of you completes your ranking without consulting the others, the individual rankings will be independent and you can see how you differ from them.
2. Discuss your different perceptions of the rankings as a team and attempt to come to agreement on the rankings based upon the discussion (Revised Rank). Take no more than 5–6 minutes to complete this step.

one copy for each member of the expert team

3. Now have one person add up the ranks assigned to each category and divide the sum by the number in your group. This average reflects your group's ranking of the importance of the categories.
4. Repeat the three steps above but from the perspective of Earth. (Write your answers in the Earth columns of the *Individual Ranking Form.*)
5. Finally, add the two rankings (for Bora-X5 and for Earth) together on the *Group Ranking Form* and divide by two to determine the combined average importance of the categories.
6. The ranking obtained in step five can be used in the next step: determining the fit between a candidate's attributes and the importance of the ranking. For example, if health turned out to be the number one criterion for your team, you might eliminate all candidates with poor health or with a major disease, regardless of their other attributes.

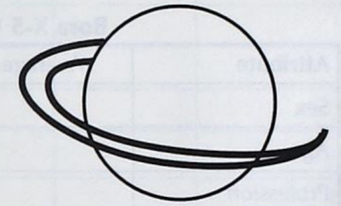


one copy for each member of the expert team

Individual Ranking Form

Instructions

After reading carefully the section, "Coming to a Decision," pages 34–35 of the handout, rank the categories in order of importance with *1* being most important and *9* being least important. Avoid giving the same number to two categories. Do the ranking for Bora-X5 first. Then discuss your rankings with your group and revise your ranking, if needed. Then do the rankings for Earth, followed by a group discussion and revision.



Importance of Attributes

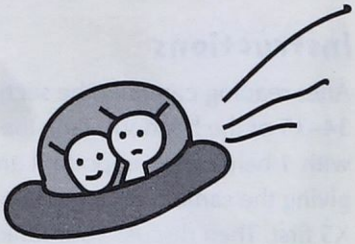
	Bora X-5		**Earth**	
Attribute	1st Rank	Rev. Rank	1st Rank	Rev. Rank
Sex				
Age				
Profession				
Health				
Citizenship				
Reason for going				
Positive attributes				
Negative attributes				
Religion				

one copy for each member of the expert team

Group Ranking Form

Instructions

After the group ranking discussion is complete, compute and record the group's average rank for each attribute for Bora-X5 and for Earth. Add these rankings and divide by two and write this value in the "Combined" column. The combined ranking will help your group select the attributes to use in screening the candidates.



Importance of Attributes

	Bora X-5 (+)	Earth (÷ 2 =)	Combined
Attribute	**Average**	**Average**	**Rank**
Sex			
Age			
Profession			
Health			
Citizenship			
Reason for going			
Positive attributes			
Negative attributes			
Religion			

one copy for the expert team

Scoring and Final Selection Form

Non-Expert Teams

Person	1	2	3	4	5	Expert	Final Score
A							
B							
C							
D							
E							
F							
G							
H							
I							
J							
K							
L							

Non-Expert Teams' Scores

Teams	Points left	Matches	Total points
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Expert Team's Score

Number of misses/Non-expert teams	Total points

to be copied on a blackboard or flipchart (or overhead transparency)

Blank Information Form

Group # ___________ Points spent ________ Points left __________ Matches ___________ Total points ________

Person	Sex	Age	Profession	Health	Citizenship	Reason for going	Positive attributes	Negative attributes	Religion
A									
B									
C									
D									
E									
F									

Person	Sex	Age	Profession	Health	Citizenship	Reason for going	Positive attributes	Negative attributes	Religion
G									
H									
I									
J									
K									
L									

one copy for each non-expert team

Completed Information Form

Person	Sex	Age	Profession	Health	Citizenship	Reason for going	Positive attributes	Negative attributes	Religion
A	M	10	Student	Good; deaf since age six	Russia	It would be fun; an adventure	Inquisitive; energetic	Relates poorly to opposite sex	Eastern Orthodox
B	F	42	Registered Nurse	Good	Pakistan	Learn new treatments for cancer and other diseases	Like to study and learn	Prejudices against Hindus	Islam
C	M	25	Sales Rep. (IBM)	Excellent; very fit	Japan	A great opportunity for expansion	Good poet; rock climber	Finds fault easily	Shinto
D	M	45	Religious leader	Very good	United States	Would like to study their religions	Excellent speaker; fund-raiser	Some women say sexist	Pentecostal
E	F	55	Village herbalist	Fair; blind since teens	Nigeria	Meet healers and learn about their skills	Thrifty; loves oral history	Stubborn; very superstitious	Ancient ways
F	M	62	Farmer	Good	China	Study farming methods	Persistent; loyal	Explosive temper	Buddhist

Person	Sex	Age	Profession	Health	Citizenship	Reason for going	Positive attributes	Negative attributes	Religion
G	M	38	Bank teller	Fair; 150 lbs. overweight	Italy	Learn how they treat those who don't "fit" in	Loves opera; good cook	Friends say talks too much	Roman Catholic
H	F	23	Journalist	Poor; has AIDS	Brazil	There's a great story here; I want to tell it	Makes friends easily	Prejudiced against men	Atheist
I	F	41	Judge	Good	India	Study their laws; how they resolve conflict	Bright; very verbal	Arrogant; has to be right	Hindu
J	F	85	Children's librarian (retired)	Good but needs wheelchair	Germany	Learn how and what they teach their children	A great storyteller	Meddles in others' affairs	Lutheran
K	F	43	Professor of literature	Good	Saudi Arabia	What is their history? Culture? I'm so curious	Willingness to help others	Jailed as troublemaker several times	Islam
L	M	33	Artist-Sculptor	Excellent	Zimbabwe	Study their art; learn what they consider beautiful	Several spouses say good lover	Friends say drinks too much	Animism

one copy for each member of the expert team, one for the game director, and one for the assistant